

NARRATOR: R.P. "Dick" Wilcomb

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves

DATE: November 23, 1999

LOCATION: Boise, Idaho

PROJECT: Smokejumpers

Tape Counter	Manu. Page	Summary
000		Introduction by Interviewer
008		Wilcomb asked the interviewer about other smokejumpers that he had interviewed. He also talked about Wayne Webb, who recently died. Wilcomb jumped in 1947, which is the first year that McCall was used as a training and jumping camp. He also talked about "Paperlegs" Peterson, who also recently died.
030		Wilcomb discussed his early life. He grew up mainly in Boise after moving here from Idaho Falls, Idaho.
055		While at the University of Idaho, Wilcomb heard about the smokejumping program. He also talked about his years in the Air Corps during World War II. He worked after the war for Jordan and Company and Morrison-Knudsen. He went to the University of Idaho for two years until he joined Jordan and Company full time.
085		Wilcomb showed his acceptance letter and some pictures, which all dealt with smokejumping. One night at the University of Idaho, he and some of his fraternity brothers decided to go to McCall to be smokejumpers.
100		Wilcomb made 7 practice jumps and 8 fire jumps. On his first jump, he did not remember jumping out of the plane, which the veterans said was natural. Wilcomb enjoyed jumping; the firefighting was harder. He was not afraid of jumping; it was other things that he feared.
120		On his thirteenth jump, Wilcomb landed on top of Charles Blanton's canopy. Wilcomb hurried off of Blanton's chute before any damage was caused. Wilcomb landed in a tree, eighty feet from the ground. The chute was caught in the tree, so they cut the tree down to get the parachute.
145		Wilcomb talked about using the rope to climb down from the tree. He continued to talk about the clothing he wore

and the items kept inside the jumpsuit, such as the let-down rope.

- 175 Wilcomb told stories of other smokejumpers who were injured during jumps in 1947.
- 190 Wilcomb thinks the training today is more rigorous than when he jumped. He talked about the various exercise they did to get into shape, including jumping out of a truck to learn how to land.
- 210 The base at McCall was similar to a military barracks. He talked about where the building for the camp came from.
- 225 McCall was a sleepy little town. Wilcomb told a story about throwing a cargo chute out of the back of a bus. They hung out at places called the Doghouse or the Foresters' Club. They also spent time at his soon-to-be bride's parents' cabin in McCall.
- 255 Wilcomb detailed what smokejumpers did when they heard the bell, which signaled a fire. He packed chutes when he was not jumping. He told a story about packing chutes with forest service officials present.
- 295 Some smokejumpers did not jump with chutes that they packed themselves. Wilcomb did not worry about that. He talked about packing chutes and what happened to the chute when the static line limit was reached. He also talked about a chute, created by the navy, to help with water landings.
- 330 Once the jumpers landed, the plane dropped the equipment with a cargo chute. Wilcomb talked about what equipment was packed in the pack. Jumpers either packed the equipment pack to the fire, or they left it where it was and took the tools with them.
- 355 Wilcomb told a story about jumping on a fire at Dollar Creek. The fire crowned while they were trying to fight it, so they ran out of the fire before they were trapped. He talked about a recent forest fire documentary that he watched at the movie theater.

- 390 Smokejumpers waited until the fire was completely out before they left. If a fire restarted, the jumpers on that fire were not paid.
- 415 After the fire was out, a pack string was sent in to pack out the equipment. They also used maps and, occasionally, radios to help them return to a road or landing strip. The man who ran the pack string got the extra food when he reached the smokejumpers. Wilcomb told a story about the packer arriving just after the plane dropped a big load of food; the packer got all of that food.
- 465 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO
- 020 When the smokejumpers returned to camp, they dropped off their gear and refilled their food bag. Their name was at the bottom of the list. Wilcomb would repair and repack parachutes until it was his turn to jump again.
- 035 Other jumpers would clear trails or other jobs until they were called to jump. Wilcomb always worked in the loft. He told a story about jumpers from Missoula, Montana, jumping on a fire to help the McCall jumpers at a place called Telegraph Creek.
- 050 Smokejumpers at McCall jumped out of either the Ford Trimotor or the Beech TravelAir. The same TravelAir that Wilcomb jumped from was returned to McCall. It is there today.
- 065 Wilcomb talked about the two pilots that flew the smokejumpers, Bob Fogg and Jim Larkin. He told stories about Bob Fogg's piloting prowess, particularly at a fire near Mackay Bar on the Salmon River. Wilcomb continued to tell a story about that particular fire.
- 110 Wilcomb stayed in touch with smokejumpers who stayed in Boise, such as Leo Compton and Bernie Nielsen. He did not keep in touch with the jumpers who did not live in Boise. He also talked about a recent book written by a former smokejumper, Bud Filler. Several smokejumpers, including the Wild brothers from McCall, meet four times a year for coffee. Glen "Ace" Nielsen started the coffee meetings. Wilcomb said they talk about everything; he told a story about one meeting when a female smokejumper was

at the meeting. She had jumped over 150 times, which was significantly more than anyone at the meeting.

160 Female smokejumpers do not bother Wilcomb. He thought it was great. He talked about his daughter who jumped twice out of an airplane during high school.

170 According to Wilcomb, it was great to be up in the air. He spent most of his time making sure he landed in the right spot. He wanted to jump again from a higher elevation, so he could enjoy it more.

185 Wilcomb gave his opinions about the Mann Gulch fire in 1949 and the Storm King fire in 1994. He also talked about the new technologies, including the fire blanket.

205 Wilcomb talked about the smokejumper magazine, which is called *Static Line*. He then showed the interviewer a few pictures of himself and his fellow smokejumpers.

245 He continued to tell stories about pictures, including one that is at McCall Air Taxi, which is owned by Kirt Braun. Wilcomb thought one person in the picture was him, but it was Lloyd Johnson, the foreman of the camp.

270 Wilcomb did not see many similarities between the military and smokejumping. He felt that the military helped him take any hazing or cajoling done at the smokejumper camp or in fraternity life at the University of Idaho. Compared to the military, smokejumping "was a piece of cake."

300 Wilcomb got along great with all the smokejumpers. He told about his good friend, Charles Blanton. They met at the University of Idaho; they initially did not like each other. Smokejumping helped them become good friends.

330 On one jump Wilcomb had the wind knocked out of him. That was the only mishap he suffered. He talked about learning to fly and working in the Blister Rust program while in high school.

365 Wilcomb told a story about being in the Natatorium in the 1930s. A limb fell through the skylights, which caused some serious damage to the Natatorium. Wilcomb jumped into the pool to save one boy, who was knocked out by a falling piece of roof. He also talked about building

swimming pools in Boise and remodeling the Natatorium into a city pool. He showed the interviewer a drawing of the Natatorium, done by Nat Adams. There was an amusement park next to the Natatorium; Wilcomb talked about all the amusements around the Natatorium.

495

END OF SIDE TWO
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

(Boise, Idaho) *Capitol News*

Arrowrock Dam

Bertram, Bus

Blanton, Charles

Bliss (Idaho) Power Plant

Boise, Idaho

Braun, Kirt

Davidson, Rod

Dollar Creek

Filler, Bud

Fogg, Bob

Horse Heaven Meadows

Idaho Falls, Idaho

Johnson, Lloyd

J.O. Jordan & Company

Larkin, Jim

Little French Creek

Mackay Bar

McCall Air Taxi

McCall, Idaho

Missoula, Montana

Nampa, Idaho

Natatorium

New York Canal [Boise, Idaho]

Overland Street

Pampa, Texas

Peterson, "Paperlegs"

Peterson, Seymour

Salmon River

Salt Lake Hardware Building (now Boise Public Library)

Telegraph Creek

University of Idaho

Vista Boulevard

Webb, Wayne

Whitney Elementary School

Wilcomb Street